2439 Heaven and Hell  
  
The world was ablaze.  
  
The darkness of the night was vanquished, chased away by an immaculate white abyss of incandescent light. The stone rubble burned… the waters of the vast lake burned, too. Fine particles of superheated dust permeated the air, turning the crumbling ruins into an inescapable furnace.  
  
The air itself burned; the sky was suffused with immolating light, turning everything below its merciless expanse into cinders and ash.  
  
The boundless ocean of flames roared, its roars fusing and melting together to speak a litany of words…  
  
Destruction. Ruination. Annihilation.  
  
At the same time, the world was frigid and frozen, devoid of all warmth.  
  
The great lake was covered in ice, frozen solid. Rime and hoarfrost covered the ruins, painting eerie patterns on the stone rubble. The stones themselves had become weak and brittle, ready to break from the smallest touch. Tiny crystals of ice drifted slowly in the frigid air, shining in the pale radiance of the shattered moon.  
  
A deep, dead silence enveloped the ruins of the colossal castle… it was a place completely devoid of warmth and life, a place where the very idea of life was strange and abhorrent.  
  
…The world had been torn in two by the clash between a Supreme Titan and a Cursed Demon, its jagged halves fighting for dominance.  
  
Nephis had infused her indomitable Will into her flames, setting the world on fire. The radiant hell she had unleashed was so terrible that the fabric of reality itself was ignited, and everything around her burned — еven the things that had never been meant to burn.  
  
At the same time, Abjuration rejected the flame. The hideous abomination refused to be burned, and in doing so, it denied the concept of heat itself, turning the world into a frozen inferno.  
  
Two opposite worlds had been born from the devastating clash of their Wills, both existing side by side as possibilities — neither realized nor entirely abolished, and therefore suspended in a state оf undetermined rivalry.  
  
As Nephis and Abjuration fought, their Wills straining against each other, one world or the other took shape for a brief moment or two, becoming reality. Then, the Cursed Demon would be scorched and burned — a heartbeat later, the flames devouring its hideous body would be extinguished, and Nephis would suddenly find herself being strangled by unbearable cold. 'This… vile… thing…'  
  
She reeled under the pressure of fighting the fallen deity's unfathomable Will and authority… of its insidious mastery over the concept of refusal that threatened to deny her very existence, let alone her ability to do the Cursed Demon harm.  
  
At the same time, she had to fight the abomination itself.  
  
The dreadful forest of skeletal limbs wreaked havoc across the ruins, exerting such furious might that countless tones of stone rubble were turning into fine dust every moment.  
  
Nephis had severed dozens of Abjuration's arms already — the blade woven from light sliced the Cursed One's flesh and bones easily, setting the bleeding stumps aflame. But the hideous abomination was too powerful and too vast, its ability to twist the absolute laws in its favor too tyrannical. So, she had not escaped from their furious clash unscathed, either.  
  
Every time Nephis managed to land a strike, Abjuration's hands would tear at her fiery form. The long fingers of the abomination blackened, and its claws cracked the moment it touched the white flames… but every time, some warmth was sapped from Nephis, making her flame a little more feeble, a little less scathing.  
  
With each blow she received, her claim to existence became a little fainter.  
  
And there was something much more terrifying happening, as well…  
  
There were billions of little flames connected to Neph's soul, tied to it by the bonds of longing. They were like tethers that anchored her to the world and reinforced her existence… they were the subjects of her Domain.  
  
With each blow she received, those flames seemed to grow a little fainter, as well.  
  
It was when Nephis realized the fact that she felt something she had not felt in a long, long time…  
  
She felt fear.  
  
At the start of her battle against Abjuration, she had regarded it with derision, assured that the terrifying fiend would not be able to negate her existence — because it would have tо negate the existence of all of humanity with her, as well.  
  
But now…  
  
The Cursed Demon was doing just that.  
  
Billions of people were connected to Nephis and her Domain of Longing, bestowing her with great power and a nearly inexhaustible ocean of spirit essence. But that connection was a blade that cut both ways.  
  
Because Nephis was connected to humanity, an especially insidious enemy could reach across the dark void through her, and follow the rays of beautiful starlight to their source. To humans who had been inspired by her, and whom she was supposed to protect.  
  
Abjuration… was one such enemy.  
  
This Cursed Demon was old, powerful, and terrifying. It had soared in the boundless heaven as one of the Spirits of Sun God's realm before falling into the vile depths of Corruption. It had survived the Doom War, outlived the Lord of Light, and spent thousands of years hiding from the merciless radiance of the orphaned sky in the sweltering darkness of Godgrave.  
  
And now, it was here, in the hidden remains of True Bastion. Liberated from under the incandescent abyss that had imprisoned it, and free to spread its appalling influence as it wished.  
  
There was only one obstacle standing in its way…  
  
Two obstacles, really.  
  
Changing Star and the Lord of Shadows.  
  
And only one of them was here to face the Cursed Demon now.  
  
Nephis bathed in the agony of her Flaw, allowing it to purify her mind and steel her resolve. She gathered her flame… she was the flame.  
  
Her soul contained the Fire.  
  
'I need to end it now.'  
  
In this battle of Will, she needed to want to end the Cursed Demon here and now, want to end it so fiercely that her scorching desire could not be denied.  
  
So…  
  
Nephis reached deep into her heart, remembering every reason she had to want to kill the enemy, and every reason she had to want to prevent the enemy from killing her.  
  
To be the last one standing.  
  
And then, she spoke a Name that she had not been able to invoke before.  
  
She invoked the Name of Passion.